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Introduction

Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification (ANZSOC)

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Overview

The third edition of the Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification (ANZSOC) has been developed for use within Australia and in New Zealand for the production and analysis of crime and justice statistics. It replaces the second edition of the Australian Standard Offence Classification (ASOC) and incorporates a title change from ASOC to ANZSOC and corrects some minor typographical errors only. The classification content and structure, which was updated in the second edition of ASOC following a review of the first edition of ASOC released in 1997, remains unchanged. The revised title ANZSOC reflects the international use of the framework to classify criminal behaviour and highlights the collaborative work occurring between Australia and New Zealand. The title change from ASOC to ANZSOC is also in accordance with the agreed policy between the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Statistics New Zealand to harmonise classifications where possible.

The objective of the ANZSOC is to provide a uniform national statistical framework for classifying criminal behaviour in the production and analysis of crime and justice statistics. The ANZSOC is used in Australian Bureau of Statistics statistical collections, Statistics New Zealand statistical collections, Australian police, criminal courts and corrective services agencies and New Zealand police and justice agencies.

There are two main purposes of the Classification:

- to provide a standardised statistical framework for organising key behavioural characteristics of criminal offences; and
- to overcome differences in legal offence definitions across states and territories.

Historical development

The ANZSOC was created to provide a framework capable of being applied at various levels for classifying offences for statistical purposes.

In the 2008 review of ASOC, external consultations were undertaken with a range of users in the crime and justice field to identify aspects of the ASOC requiring attention. The ABS sought information on all aspects of the classification including information on developments in legislation, new and emerging areas of crime, useful groupings of offences and general comment and opinion about the structure of the Classification. The aim of the review is to improve the Classification in the following ways:

- improved coverage to cater for offences of emerging importance;
- increased relevance and useability; and
- maintainance of comparability and continuity between ASOC 1997 and the second edition.

ANZSOC structure

The ANZSOC is a classification with three levels: Divisions (the broadest level), Subdivisions (the intermediate level) and Groups (the finest level). At the divisional level, the main purpose is to provide a limited number of categories that provide a broad overall picture of offence types, that are suitable for the publication of summary tables in official statistics. The subdivision and group levels provide increasingly detailed dissections of these categories for the compilation of more specific and detailed statistics.

The structure of the ANZSOC is illustrated below.

Level Example

Division 10	Illicit drug offences
Subdivision 101	Import or export illicit drugs
Group 1011	Import illicit drugs

There are 16 divisions within the ASOC with codes numbered 01 to 16. The divisional structure for the third edition of ANZSOC is as follows:

Division Title

01 Homicide and related offences
02 Acts intended to cause injury
03 Sexual assault and related offences
04 Dangerous or negligent acts endangering persons
05 Abduction, harassment and other offences against the person
06 Robbery, extortion and related offences
07 Unlawful entry with intent/burglary, break and enter
08 Theft and related offences
09 Fraud, deception and related offences
10 Illicit drug offences
11 Prohibited and regulated weapons and explosives offences
12 Property damage and environmental pollution
13 Public order offences
14 Traffic and vehicle regulatory offences
15 Offences against government procedures, government security and government operations
16 Miscellaneous offences

Conceptual basis of the classification

Scope of the classification

The primary purpose of the ANZSOC is to provide a systematic ordering of criminal offences defined in the criminal laws of the Australian state and territory jurisdictions and in New Zealand. For the purposes of ANZSOC, an offence is defined as: any criminal act or omission by a person, persons, organisation or organisations for which a penalty could be imposed by the Australian legal system or the New Zealand legal system.

The definitions of categories have been specifically chosen to minimise any confusion as to the boundaries of each category. As a result the content of each category is uniform across jurisdictions, despite differences in legislation.

Classification criteria

At the broadest level, the Classification makes distinctions based on the most fundamental elements of legal and behavioural criteria. These include:

- Whether the offence involved the use of violence;
- Whether the offence compromised the safety or well-being of persons or was solely directed at the acquisition or damage of property;
- Whether the offence involved an intentional act or resulted from recklessness or negligence; and
- Whether the offence had a specific victim, or constituted a breach of public order or other social codes.

Six criteria were used in the development of the Classification:

- **Violence:** Whether violence is involved. If violence is involved the nature and level of the violence is considered including whether a weapon was used, whether abduction or deprivation of liberty was involved, whether the violence was sexual in nature and the outcome of the violence (e.g. whether life was taken, threatened or endangered).
- **Acquisition:** Whether the intent of the offence is acquisitive (e.g. to obtain property). If so, the method of acquisition including theft, the use of extortion or blackmail or the use of deception, is considered.
- **Nature of Victim:** The nature and vulnerability of the victim or object offended against. Types of victims include persons, property and the community.
- **Ancillary Offences:** Whether the offence only exists as an extension of, or in relation to, another offence. Such offences include attempts, threats and conspiracies to commit another offence, or offences involving the intent that another offence shall take place.
- **Seriousness:** Seriousness can be reflected through the involvement or otherwise of a personal victim, or it can be measured as a function of factors of aggravation, such as whether the victim was vulnerable; whether the offence was committed in company; or whether a weapon was used. It is important to note however that the divisions of the Classification are not ranked by seriousness. The National Offence Index (NOI) is a separate statistical tool that enables selected ANZSOC groups to be ranked in order of seriousness.
- **Intent:** Whether the offence occurs as a result of a negligent or reckless act, or as a result of an intent to commit an offence. This criterion distinguishes, for example, manslaughter from murder.

Design considerations

Certain design considerations were deemed to be of particular importance in determining the structure of the Classification. They included that:

- The categories encompass, as far as possible, the various legal definitions and criminal codes in use across Australian jurisdictions and in New Zealand.
- The offences categorised in the Classification be representative of information available and typically reported on when collecting data.
- The Classification allow the provision of information to address important areas of social concern.
- The Classification exhibit statistical balance. That is, offences should be distributed relatively evenly within divisions across the Classification.

Application of the criteria

In applying the Classification criteria the following approach has been adopted. At the broad level, each division has been made relatively homogenous in terms of the violence and acquisition criteria described above. This means that in general, a division does not include both offences where violence is involved, and offences where violence is not involved. There are exceptions to this general rule, notably Division 13, which includes riot and affray together with non-violent offences such as censorship crimes; and Division 06, which includes armed robbery together with demands made via a letter. This latter offence could be considered non-violent in nature. In both of these situations it was considered that the overall intent of the divisions overrode strict application of the criteria.

Similarly, divisions generally avoid mixing offences where the intent is acquisitive, with offences where the primary intent is not acquisitive. The exception to this rule is Division 06, in which blackmail/extortion is grouped together with robbery. The former offence may be intended to cause the victim loss of something other than property, or alternatively, to act in ways not necessarily resulting in an acquisitive gain on the part of the offender. Again, it was considered that the overall intent of the divisions overrode strict application of the criteria.

Attempts, threats, intentions, and conspiracies are generally classified in the same subdivision as the actual offence. For example, conspiracy to steal is classified alongside actual stealing offences in Division 08.

Divisions 01 to 06 of the Classification involve offences committed against a person. That is:

- They all relate to culpable (i.e. intentional, negligent or reckless) acts that result in harm (i.e. physical injury/violation, or non-physical harm). These acts are not necessarily completed; they include attempts and conspiracies.
- These acts must affect a specific person as opposed to the general public. That is, the victim(s) can only ever be a distinct person or persons. Thus, the acts cannot be committed against organisations, the state or the community.

The primary basis for distinguishing between Divisions 01 to 06 is the nature and degree of harm. The secondary basis of classification is whether the act was intentional or negligent.

For some offences in Divisions 03 and 04, the vulnerability of the victim is also a factor, but only in cases of non-assaultive sexual offences against children and neglect of persons under care.

Divisions 06 to 09 inclusive and Division 12 include offences that generally relate to property and which, with the exception of Division 06, do not involve any offence against the person. Divisions 06 to 09 in particular have a secondary common feature in that they involve the obtaining of a benefit. These divisions are distinguished from one another by whether or not violence was involved, and by the method of acquisition. Thus, robbery is distinguished from theft, and theft distinguished from deception offences. Division 12, which contains property damage as opposed to its acquisition, also includes environmental pollution.

Divisions 10 and 11, and 13 to 16 inclusive, are offences against organisations, government (local, state or federal) and the community in general, rather than against particular individual persons.

The structure of some divisions, such as Divisions 10, 11 and 14, has been specified in a manner intended to reflect user requirements

relating to policy and/or research issues concerning offences involving drugs, firearms and vehicles.

Supplementary codes

When using the ANZSOC to code data, there may be instances in which there is insufficient information to code to a four-digit group level. In such situations a Supplementary code may be applied. Supplementary codes may be generated by taking a three-digit subdivision code and adding a single zero to create a four-digit code.

In any instances where a subdivision cannot be selected, the most suitable division is selected and two zeros are appended to its code to make a four-digit code.

Supplementary codes are structured as follows:

Code Description

1000 Illicit drug offences not further defined

1010 Import or export illicit drugs not further defined

There are two further Supplementary codes that may be used if the situation explicitly warrants it. If the data provided cannot be assigned to any ANZSOC division, and no further detail may be obtained from the source, then the four-digit code of 9999 can be used. If no data are provided at all, and again there is no provision for contacting the data provider, then the four-digit code of 9998 can be used.

Contextual offences

While the ANZSOC organises offences by behavioural attributes, often users of crime statistics have requirements for grouping data by other attributes. For example, by the relationship of the victim and perpetrator or location of offence (with family and domestic violence offences), or the mode of the offence (with electronic crime offences). This requires offence groupings by a specific contextual relationship. It is recognised that there is a strong user need for the inclusion of contextual offences, such as Terrorism, Family and domestic violence and E-crime, in ANZSOC. This is beyond the current capabilities of the ANZSOC publication. Each of these concepts is discussed in greater detail below.

Terrorism

Terrorism, rather than representing one offence or behaviour, is a constellation of criminal behaviours. The vast majority of these, whilst they can be termed terrorist acts under certain circumstances, can also exist as non-terrorism related offences (such as assault, homicide, property offences, or weapons offences). 'Sedition' and 'Acts that are harmful to or threaten national security' are included in the ANZSOC under Group 1559, Offences against government security, nec, and new terrorism offences ('Be a member/provide support to a terrorist organisation'; 'Incite terrorism'; and 'Conspire, prepare or plan a terrorist act') have been added to the list of inclusions within this group.

Family and domestic violence

Family and domestic violence is an important criminal incident type that is a government policy priority in most, if not all, jurisdictions and is an issue that needs to be represented statistically. However, family and domestic violence is a complicated construct to represent statistically using the ANZSOC, as a wide range of offending behaviours may be related to family or domestic violence, such as property damage, cruelty to animals, assault and/or sexual assault.

Cybercrime

Electronic crime rarely represents a specific offence, and often includes a wide range of non-technology linked offences, which can also be committed using electronic means. The behaviour is not necessarily different - this is generally a distinction made based on mode. Where a computer can be used to commit an offence, but has historically been committed without a computer, these offences are coded based on the behaviour of that offence. For example, although child abuse material offences can be facilitated by the use of a computer and the internet, the behaviour associated with the offence remains unchanged based on the mode of production, and the offences should be coded accordingly.

Supporting products

National Offence Index

The [National Offence Index \(NOI\)](https://statistics.classifications/national-offence-index/latest-release) ([/statistics/classifications/national-offence-index/latest-release](https://statistics.classifications/national-offence-index/latest-release)), assists in the output of nationally comparable offence information with the purpose of enabling the representation of a defendant/person in custody by a single offence. For example, where a defendant in a criminal court has two or more offences against them which fall into different output offence categories, the NOI ensures that the most serious offence is chosen to represent that defendant.

The original NOI is based on the Offence Seriousness Index developed by the Crime Research Centre (CRC) in Western Australia. The CRC Index was developed based on research conducted into public perceptions of offence seriousness, and also considered legislated sentences of offences. It uses the ASOC 4-digit group codes to rank offences. While the NOI provides a hierarchical ranking of offences based on seriousness, the ANZSOC provides a categorisation of divisions for the purposes of statistical output. As a result, the NOI and the ANZSOC are complementary tools with different functions.

Concordances

The ASOC concordances show the relationship between the respective categories of the first and second editions of the Classification. These concordances are provided in the Data Downloads.

Further information

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